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A PLAN FOR THE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRESIDIO

SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING · AUGUST 1961

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James Keilty, Senior City Planner, was in charge of the preparation of this plan and report. Assisting him were:

Ruth Jaffe, Associate City Planner
Samuel Jung, Associate City Planner
Frank E. Hendricks, Senior Draftsman
Eda Kavin, City Planning Draftsman
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Rose Heimerl, Clerk-Stenographer

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San Francisco (Calif.).
Dept. of City Planning.
A plan for the
residential development
1961.

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The Honorable George Christopher, Mayor
City Hall
San Francisco 2, California.

September 7, 1961

Dear Mayor Christopher:

It is with pleasure that I transmit to you this report on a plan for the residential development of the Presidio, prepared by the staff of the Department of City Planning, in response to your letter of July 31, 1961.

The Planning Commission reviewed this plan at a meeting on August 24, 1961 and approved it for submission to you.

Very truly yours,

Gardner W. Mein, President
City Planning Commission

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A PLAN FOR THE RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRESIDIO

SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING · AUGUST 1961

I L L U S T R A T I O N S

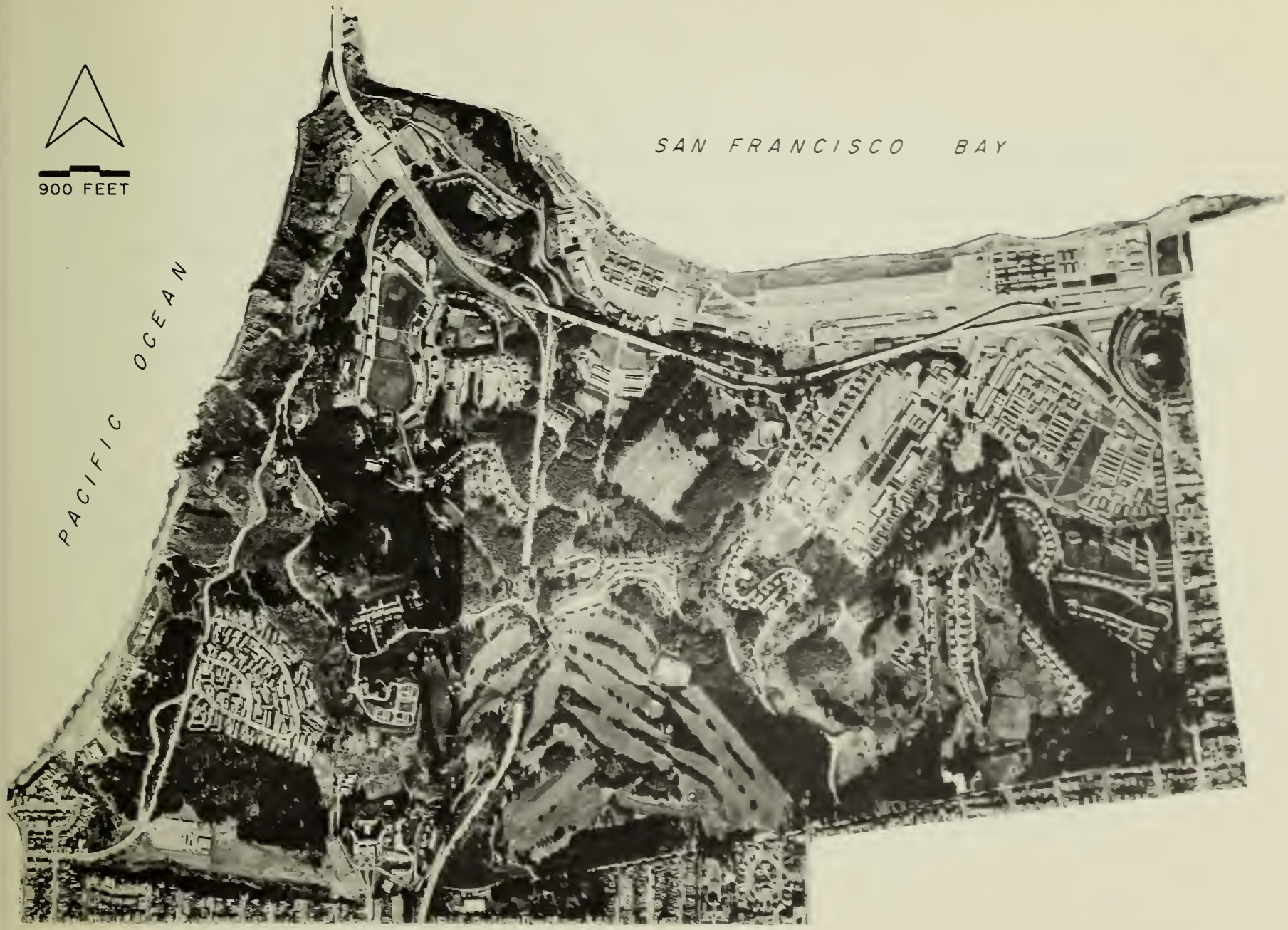
Aerial Photograph - - Presidio 1959

Photograph of Presidio Working Model

Alternate Plan A

Alternate Plan B

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF THE PRESIDIO TAKEN IN 1959



I N T R O D U C T I O N

Over the past few years, the Presidio of San Francisco has been the subject of a persistent rumor to the effect that it was imminently to be declared surplus to the Federal Government's needs. In the past, there has been constant denial on the part of the military occupants that this was to take place or, in fact, could take place. Nevertheless, the rumor rather than dissipating, seems to gather force from year to year.

The Department of City Planning has long been concerned with this particular property and its ultimate development. In fact, the officially adopted Land Use Section of the Master Plan, assumes that the property will remain in institutional and public use within the twenty-year time span of that plan. This assumption was based in part on an opinion expressed by the local authority occupying the site, which is the Army.

The Presidio is undoubtedly one of the most magnificent properties in the entire nation for its spectacular setting and surroundings, its wealth of topographic interest and for the richness and variety of its flora. Such a prized location cannot be allowed to suffer an indiscriminate and insensitive development. Certainly, without

a plan to guide its integrated development, the result would inevitably be a development unworthy of the site. To allow chance to reign, as it has in other dramatic and potentially lovely parts of this city, would be a criminal act of omission.

The responsibility of the community is even greater in this case for, not only is a guide and plan a fundamental necessity, but the quality of the plan, the quality of the imagination and the quality of the concept which serves as the foundation of the plan cannot be less than the best that is humanly attainable.

Few communities, and this one least of all, achieve a complete agreement among their members on what is best in any given case. The interests involved range from those who express a complete lack of concern for any factor involved other than the monetary to those who make no concession to the monetary principle at all. In the case at hand, these interests would be equivalent to those who would prefer little or no public control over development, if the land should be made available to them, and those who would have no part of the site used except for public purposes. To many, the ideal may, indeed, be the exclusive use of the Presidio for park and institutional

purposes or failing that, a maintenance of the status quo. However, if the site were to be made available for private development, it is the clear responsibility of this department to be fore-armed with the scheme, the concept and the ideas that may influence the developers in the way of achieving a possible best or, at very least, a more than probable better development.

GOALS OF THE PLAN

At the outset it is necessary to establish, in some measure, what the possible best might be in terms of a residential development of the Presidio. In the most general terms, it is certainly a development that will result in the enhancement of the site. In this respect, enhancement extends to the effect this development would have, not only on the Presidio lands themselves, but also on the city in which they are situated and, in the case of a salient site such as this, on the whole Bay Area. The more specific meaning of enhancement will be discussed later in terms of standards and design concepts.

Another goal that is assumed in the plan has to do not so much with the actual betterment of the property, but rather with its ultimate usefulness to the people of this city and the metropolitan area. A residential development of the Presidio should be available to the broadest attainable range of family sizes and income levels. The achievement of this particular goal will, in great measure, be determined by the marketing procedures to be used in making the property available to private developers. The marketing techniques, evolved in the redevelopment program,

that has been carried out over the past few years in San Francisco, provide at least one precedent. The Redevelopment Agency has had precisely this goal in mind in selling part of the land to developers in the Western Addition and in the Diamond Heights project areas. The application of these methods to the Presidio lands, therefore, would seem to indicate that this agency's experience should be utilized, if legally possible; that, in effect, any disposition of Presidio lands for private development should be done under existing or future provisions of the redevelopment law. There seems very little likelihood, otherwise, that the goal of providing a relatively broad range of building types and of prices (either rents or land prices) could in fact be achieved. It would obviously be out of the question if all the land to be developed were to be auctioned off to the highest bidder although this procedure is one that is often used in the disposition of public lands to private developers.

Finally, harking back to the original goal of enhancing the site, it would be the goal of a development plan for the Presidio to insure that the impact of such development would result in the physical betterment of the immediately surrounding

areas. Certainly, no development of a site should have the effect of reducing the values of the existing developed area adjoining it, which, in the case of the Presidio, includes some of the finest residential properties in San Francisco.

BASIC ALTERNATIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT

A developmental scheme for the Presidio inevitably involves a choice between basic alternatives. Not every possible alternative could be explored in the time available to the work of making a general plan. Therefore, certain alternatives which would affect the scheme have had to be arbitrarily set aside with the provision that the scheme will be sufficiently flexible to allow for their introduction without prejudicing the basic concepts underlying the plan. For instance, the plan does not indicate any part of the Presidio in use as an Army Post, although, in fact, some part of it may remain in active use or may be retained for Army Hospital purposes. An adjustment of the plan to accommodate these alternatives would be possible. The greater freedom obtained, assuming a more or less clean slate, has a decided advantage at this stage of the planning.

In the case of the Presidio golf course, the alternative of retaining it or using the land for new development was explored and is reflected in the two development schemes under consideration.

In both plans the U. S. National Cemetery has been retained as a basic

element of the plan as well as the U. S. Marine Hospital and the lands long ago set aside for its future expansion.

CONCEPTS EMPLOYED BY THE PLAN

The concepts used in making a plan for the residential development of the Presidio stem from the principal goal of the plan, namely, to propose a development that would result in the enhancement of an already superior site. Enhancement assumes that this superior site is respected and is the fundamental determinent in arriving at a plan. The site includes, in this case, not only the land form itself but the natural and planted flora and those man-made things which are deemed to be of historical, architectural or of community interest.

At the outset, then, it was determined that there would be no major, physical re-arrangement of the land, of the contours, and that the preservation of trees and tree groupings would be a major factor in the location of buildable areas and circulation systems.

Next, areas of outstanding natural beauty or of historical interest were identified and it was determined that these were to be preserved, in the plan, for public use. Thus, all of the Golden Gate headlands, Bakers Beach, The U.S. National Cemetery and other specific areas indicated on the plan have been set aside as part

of the public domain. Some of these reserved areas are intended to preserve existing open space where, as along the southern boundary of the Presidio, the open space has determined, in large measure, the high quality of the existing private residential, development outside the Presidio.

A basic concept of this plan is that, even in those areas where private development is contemplated, this development should be woven together with the natural environment, preserving to whatever degree possible, existing trees and tree groupings. Heretofore, in San Francisco, areas of private development and areas of natural growth, public open spaces and parks, have, with minor exceptions, been separate and distinct entities. The Presidio, however, presents an opportunity to depart from this scheme in the direction of a more integrated site planning where the natural and the man-made are brought together for a mutual enhancement.

In the design of the circulation pattern for the development of the Presidio, the plan incorporates several important concepts. The separation of pedestrian and vehicular circulation and the separation of different patterns of vehicular circulation

are the major design guides.

Vehicular circulation has been placed in the following categories:

Freeway circulation: Including the Lombard Street and the Park-Presidio Boulevard approaches to the Golden Gate Bridge with a ramp connection to Marina Boulevard. This system is entirely separate from the road system of the Presidio and the only connection between these two systems within the Presidio is provided at the Golden Gate Bridge toll plaza. The plan indicates the changes in the Park-Presidio approach to the bridge presently programmed by the State Division of Highways.

Parkway circulation: The plan indicates the major parkway or scenic routes traversing the Presidio. Parkways would include a generous, landscaped right-of-way on either side of the roadway which would not be available for development or access to private properties.

Major Thoroughfares: These streets provide the major circulation pattern for vehicles having destinations within the Presidio. As in the case of the Parkways, major thoroughfares would not permit access to private properties, on either side of the road-

way, but the right-of-way would, in most cases, not be as wide or as heavily planted as that provided for a Parkway..

Secondary Thoroughfares: These streets provide the principal circulation within the different neighborhoods which would be developed in the Presidio. Such streets would provide access to private development on either side. Such streets would also be designed to discourage fast movement within the areas they serve or their use for cross-Presidio traffic.

Residential Access Streets: These streets are entirely designed for use as access to the properties along them. Many of these are cul-de-sac or loop streets.

Pedestrian circulation as well as bicycle paths would be provided, linking the residential areas to the parks, the schools and the shopping and community facilities serving the neighborhoods.

Transit: If the present plans of the Rapid Transit District as they affect the Presidio and the Golden Gate Bridge are carried out, it is recommended that a transit stop be provided in the Presidio at a location close to the Park-Presidio

Boulevard section of the Freeway. Ample parking space could be provided here at a point central to the neighborhoods proposed in the plan.

Local transit serving the Presidio neighborhoods would use the major and secondary thoroughfare networks.

THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

The plan indicates the organization of the residential portion of the Presidio in two or three neighborhoods, depending on whether the Presidio golf course were to be preserved, or used for development. The size of these neighborhoods would vary depending on the number of other facilities that might occupy the site. In other words, if Letterman Hospital were to remain in the Presidio, one of the neighborhoods might be reduced by the amount required for a hospital site.

Each of the neighborhoods would contain an elementary school at a convenient, and suitable location and a shopping center where such a facility would be most convenient and least likely to produce traffic congestion. One other public school, a junior high school, is indicated in the plan.

Sites for such other private institutional uses as churches, private and parochial schools or even larger educational or cultural institutions would be available. Two principal types of residential development are suggested for the neighborhoods. One of these would be individual, single-family homes located, possibly in the vicinity of the Cow Hollow neighborhood on the eastern boundary of the Presidio and, again over-

looking the western Presidio headlands, south of the Golden Gate. The rest of the residential land would be available for a more mixed residential development. Here, high-rise, medium height and lower structures could be located, using the existing topography to determine the most suitable location for each. The high-rise structures would for the most part occupy the ridge tops and the high bluffs where they could take full advantage of the view over the City, the Bay and the Ocean shore and where they would least interfere with views from the slopes and the lower portions of the site.

The Presidio contains, in all, approximately 1500 acres. The residential development indicated on the plan in which the golf course is used for housing would amount to approximately 500 acres (without counting the 40 acre Wherry Housing site). At a density of 50 persons per acre, the plan would result in a population of approximately 25,000 persons. That number of resident persons would normally include a child population sufficient to require a junior high school within the service area.

In approximate figures, the plan includes 21 acres for elementary school

sites, 47 acres for playgrounds (including the existing Julius Kahn playground), 12 acres of commercial uses directly serving the neighborhoods and nine acres of community facilities such as churches and meeting places.

An important feature of the plan is a 48 acre park occupying the valley on the eastern side of the Presidio and extending from the Palace of Fine Arts to the southern boundary of the Presidio.

Outside the residential area, 300 acres have been set aside for the preservation of the ocean and bayshore headlands, 65 acres are included in the inner parkway right-of-way, and 22 acres are taken up by the park reservation along the southern Presidio boundary.

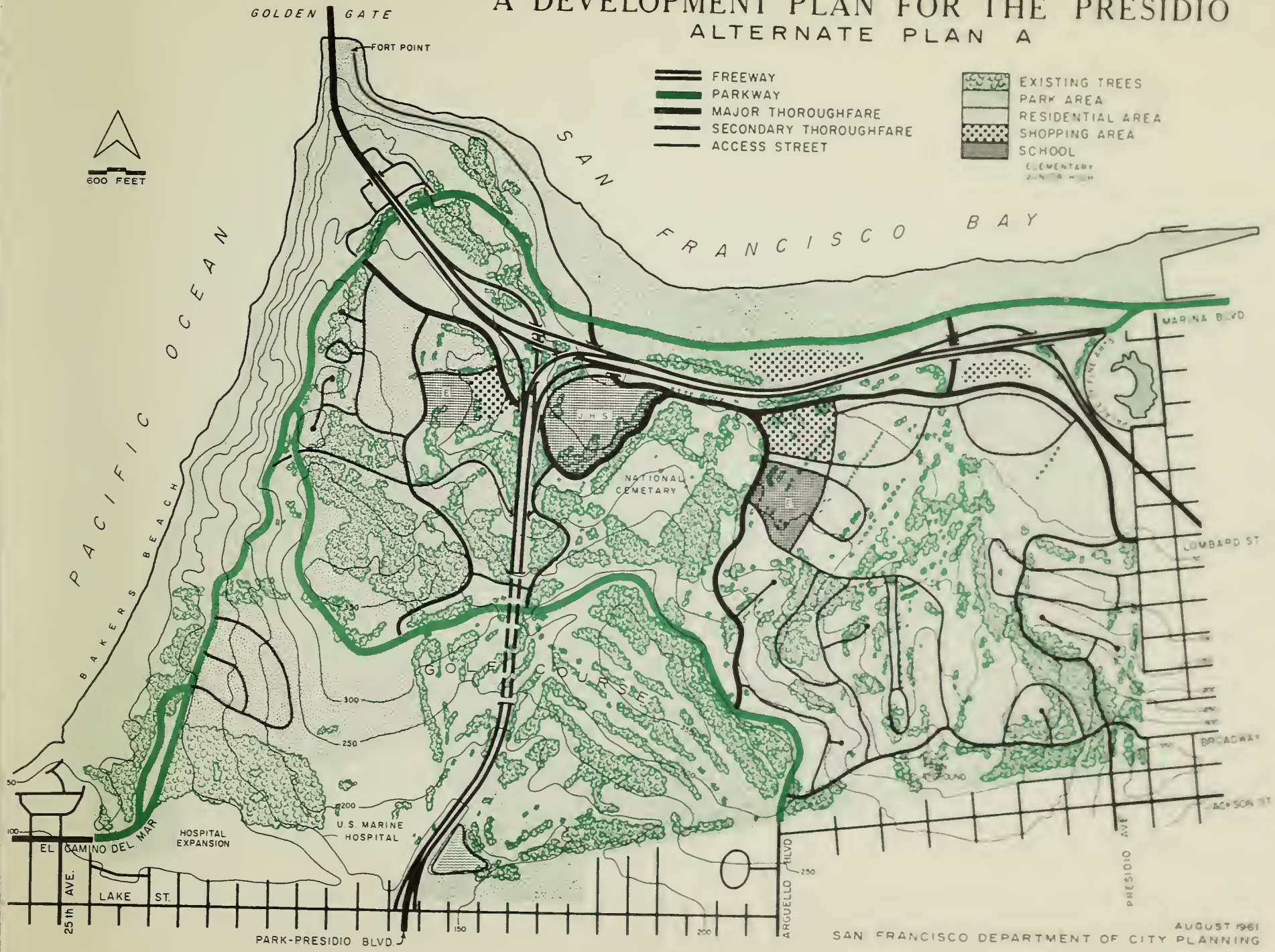
The plan provides an area for more general commercial uses related to the recreational development along the Bayshore.

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE PRESIDIO WORKING MODEL

PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

A DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE PRESIDIO

ALTERNATE PLAN A



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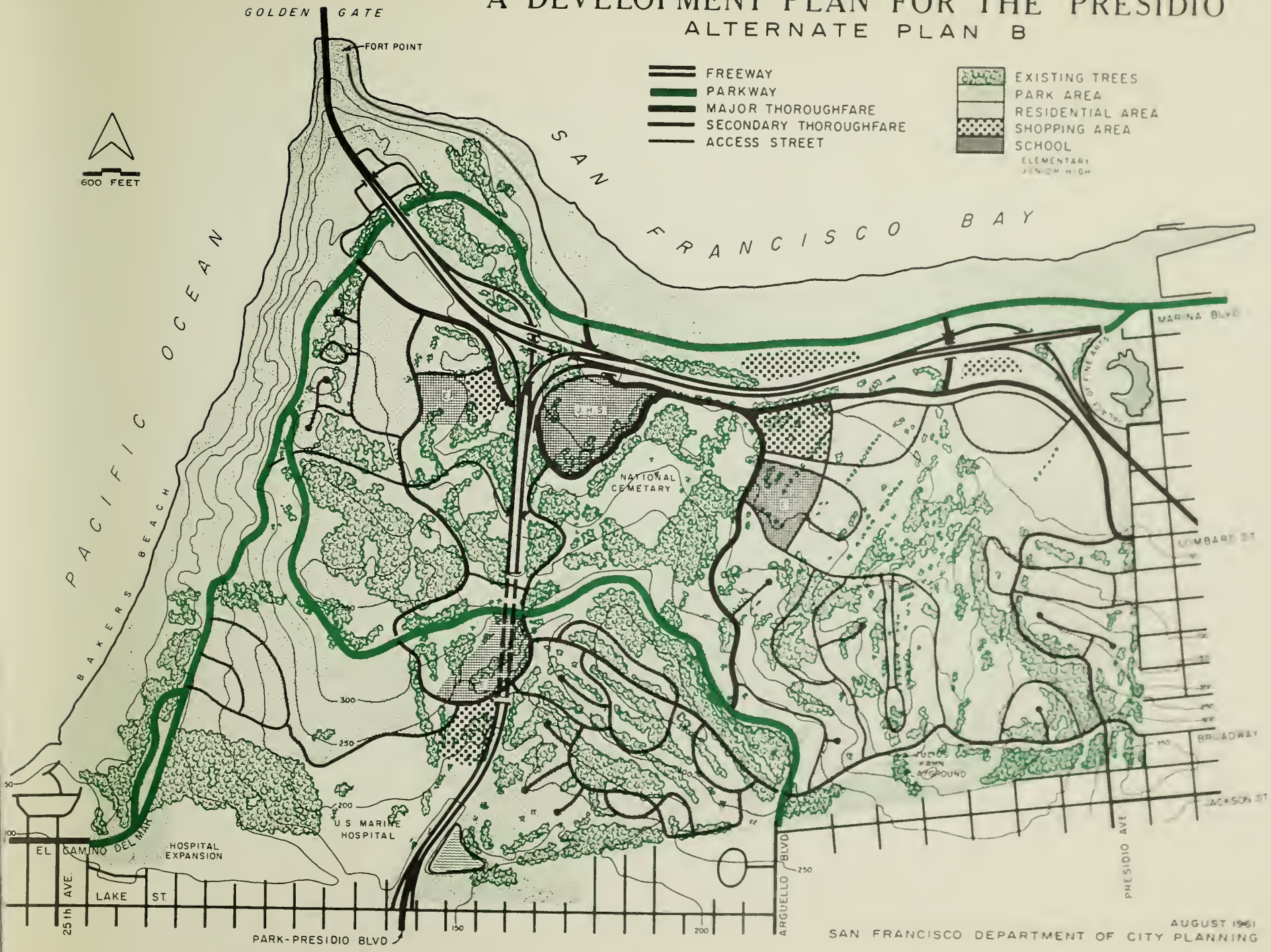
ALTERNATE PLAN B